

ROLE OF RURAL AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION CENTRE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF FLORICULTURE COMMUNITY IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The Plain Areas Of West Bengal Are The Paradise Of Flowers, Because Of Varied Agro-Climatic Condition Suitable For Growing Different Kind Of Flowers, Floriculture Information Is Very Important For The Development Of The Floriculture Community. In This Aspect, The Rural Agricultural Information Centre Plays A Vital Role To Disseminate Proper Information To The Floriculture Community In Their Regional Language. Rural Libraries Can Play A Big Role To Disseminate Agriculture Related Information To The Farming Community In This Aspect. But Due To The Lack Of Appropriate Infrastructure The Rural Libraries In This State Cannot Perform Such Kind Of Role. Due To A Lack Of Government Support, Farm Communities Can't Utilize The Resources In The Field Of Agriculture. The Government Have To Take Positive Initiatives For The Sustainable Development Of Floriculture Community.

KEYWORDS: *Information, Rural Agricultural Information Centre, Floriculture Community, West Bengal & Rural Libraries*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Floriculture is a branch of modern agriculture and a discipline of horticulture. Floriculture is a very fast emerging and highly competitive industry in West Bengal. The Government of India has established floriculture as a sunrise industry and accorded it 100 percent export-oriented status. The domestic Indian market is growing at the rate of 25 percent per year in the country as a whole. According to NHB (National Horticulture Board), the country has exported 19726.57 MT of floriculture products to the world for the worth of Rs. 571.38 crores in 2018-2019.

The plain areas of West Bengal are the paradise of flowers. Favourable climatic condition, tolerable temperature, graceful monsoon and availability of manpower places West Bengal in an advantageous position in this field. Thus floriculture offers a great opportunity to the floriculture community in term of income generation and empowerment. In rural areas of West Bengal, many people are largely depending on floriculture, though it is not the main crop of West Bengal, nowadays floriculture is taking place of other crops gradually and its importance is increasing day by day in many districts of West Bengal. For the sustainable development of Floriculture Community, information and knowledge are very important. In this aspect, the Rural Agricultural Information System plays a vital role in the overall development of the floriculture community.

2. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives of this paper are:

- To highlight the bright future of the floriculture industry in West Bengal.
- To identify the role of Rural Agricultural Information Centres in the field of floriculture.
- To find out the supporting role of rural libraries as community information centres for the sustainable development of floriculture community.
- To promote interaction and information exchanges between floriculture community with their resources.
- To support the development of Model Floriculture Information System to disseminate information properly to the floriculture community.

3. FLORICULTURE IN WEST BENGAL

Floriculture is one of the parts of Horticulture which deals not only with the cultivation of flowers and foliage plants but production of value-added products from the flowers and also marketing of flowers and those products.

West Bengal emerged as a flower producing state in the atlas of Indian floriculture. The strength of floriculture development in West Bengal is due to suitable agro-climatic condition, availability of manpower and lastly large demand for floriculture products in national and international markets. West Bengal ranked 4th in position as a flower producing state (10.5%), after Tamil Nadu (18.20%), Andhra Pradesh (13.9%) and Karnataka (11.9%).

In West Bengal, floriculture is comprised of both loose flowers and cut flowers.

a. Loose Flowers

Loose flowers are generally cultivated in an open field, where the flowers have been exposed to both biotic and abiotic stresses. Loose flowers are offered in religious and social ceremonies and mainly in the worship of god in household eg. Jasmine, Rose, Marigold, Tuberose, Hibiscus, Beli, Balsam etc.

b. Cut Flowers

Cut flowers are grown in greenhouses, shade houses as well as outdoor also. Environmental factors like water, temperature, light and other essential factors like manure, fertilizers are partially or entirely under strict control eg. Orchid, Chrysanthemum, Dutch Rose, Gerbera, Gladiolus, Carnation etc.

Table 1: Total Areas and Production of Flowers in India in 2018-2019

2018-2019 Area in Hectares(Ha) Production in Metric Ton (MT)	
Area	Production
339Ha	Cut flower
	867MT
	Loose flower
	1991 MT
Source: National Horticulture Board (NHB) Database	

Table 2. Total Areas and Production of Flowers in West Bengal in 2018-2019

2018-2019 Area in Hectares(Ha) Production in Metric Ton (MT)		
Area	Production	
27.62Ha	Cut flower	Loose flower
	221.64MT	77.25MT
Source: National Horticulture Board (NHB) Database		

West Bengal is one of the leading flowers producing state among all states in India. In West Bengal the main flower producing areas are as follows:

3.1 Flower Producing Zones of West Bengal

To meet the huge demand of our regular life, floriculture has been developed in West Bengal in a remarkable way. In the present situation, approximately 1.5 million farmers are engaged in floriculture in West Bengal. The important floricultural zones of the state are divided into two sub-zones, such as a) South Bengal and b) North Bengal.

a. South Bengal	b. North Bengal
Nadia	Darjeeling
Purba Medinipur	Kalimpang
Paschim Medinipur	Jalpaiguri
Howrah	Cooch Behar
North 24 Parganas	Alipurduar
South 24 Parganas	

4. FLORICULTURE COMMUNITY IN WEST BENGAL

A community is a group of people having the same interest. According to Giggey (1988), community is “a group of people who have something common. This can be their age, education, religion, interest, political affiliation, activities, work, possession or a combination of two or more of these”, and Floriculture community can be defined as the persons associated with floriculture.

The different stakeholders under floriculture community are- Government of India sponsored floriculture sector organization and institution, State Government sponsored floriculture sector organization and institution, Floriculture Research Centre, Non-government organizations (NGOs), Flower growers or farmers, People related to flower marketing, producers of manures, fertilizers, seeds which are used in floriculture.

5. ROLE OF RURAL AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION CENTRES (RAICS)

Information is very essential for each and every community. Information is a part of the basic needs of human life, so, it can be said that without information, survival and development of any community is not possible. To disseminate floriculture information the role of Rural Agricultural Information Centres is very important. The centres are providing agricultural as well as floricultural information for the sustainable development of floriculture community.

Rural Agricultural Information Centres (RAICs) are described as information centres that provide agricultural information as well as floricultural information because floriculture is a branch of modern agriculture for the survival and growth of the rural agriculture community. The services which are provided by the centre to the rural agricultural community are called Rural Agricultural Information Service. Examples of Rural Agricultural Centres are Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kisan Call Centre, District Agricultural Offices, and District Horticultural Offices. These centres provide information to the rural agricultural community according to their own ways. These centres serve as information and knowledge providing centres from where the farm community can obtain assistance for solving their day to day agriculture related problems.

The experts of these centres provide on-farm services (Krishi Vigyan Kendra, District Agricultural Offices, and District Horticultural Offices) by visiting the field of the farmers on a weekly or monthly basis and through different training programs like Krishi Mela, Field Day, Talk Show, Front Line Demonstration, they provide basic information as well as modern technological development regarding agriculture as well as floriculture. The experts always keep in touch with progressive farmers through WhatsApp Group, Facebook Page, and different mobile Apps prepared by the scientists of these centres or through direct contacts.

Other than on-farm services, off-farm services are also provided by the centres (Kisan Call Centre). By toll free number, farmers can contact the experts of the centre to solve their agriculture related problems. The expert of the centre answered the problem of the farmers and feedback also collected from the farmers regarding their problems.

The experts provide every kind of information to the farm community related to agriculture such as soil related information, water related information, weather or climatic update, crop related information, market related information, about application advanced technologies, manure or fertilizer related information, planting materials or seed related information in their local language.

The dissemination of information by these centres is done by different stages. These are as follows:

a. Stage I- Generation of Information

Generation of information is very important for the development farm community. Agriculture information as well as floriculture information is generated in different ways, such as from Agriculture and Horticulture research and development institutes, Agricultural universities, Agricultural experts, Government and Non-government organization related to agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Department, Climatic Information Department.

b. Stage II- Consolidation and Transformation of Information

Generated information may be from documentary or non-documentary source are consolidated and transformed in such a manner that the floriculture community get their information according to their needs.

Through information communication technology nowadays information consolidated, transformed, digitized, store in electronic format as image or text accordingly to the needs of the floriculture community. The database contains different kind of information like- Climatic information, crop related information i.e fertilizers, pesticides seeds etc., floriculture technology related information, marketing related information etc.

c. Stage III- Communication and Transfer of Information

Generated information has no value unless it is communicated and transferred to the floriculture community according to their needs. Government and Non-government agencies communicate flower community through their own way like Demonstration programs, different training programs. The rural agriculture centres play a vital role in the transfer of information to the floriculture community.

The rural agriculture centres like Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kissan Call Centre, District Agriculture Offices, Block Agriculture Offices, District Horticulture Offices contains all sources of information (Documentary and Non-Documentary). The officials of these centres through different training, demonstration, Field visit disseminate technology and information related to floriculture. Sometimes farmers have contact to the experts of these centres by toll free number or physical appearance with floriculture related problems. The experts of these centres then collect data according to the cultivation related problems facing by the farmers. Then the relevant measures are transferred to the farmers in their local language according to their needs in a timely manner.

d. Stage IV –Feedback

After transferring the information to the target users/end users i.e farmers in their local language due to less education or illiteracy, the feedback is also taken from the farmers. If the farmers are not benefitted from the advice of the experts then further alternative advice are also transferred to the farmers.

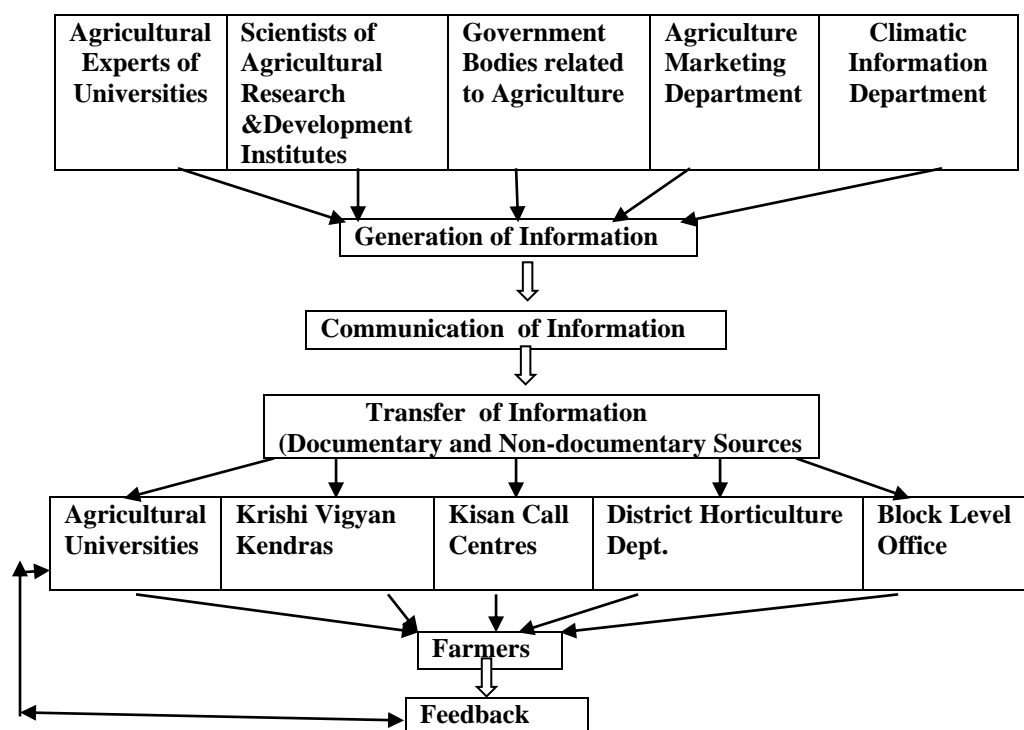


Figure 1: Stages of Information Flow in Floriculture Community.

6. ROLE OF RURAL LIBRARIES AS AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY CENTRES

Our society is nowadays going through a vast change due to the generation of huge information in the field of agriculture. In this context, rural libraries can play a vital role to disseminate agricultural information to the agricultural community. The rural libraries of the main flower producing districts of West Bengal can help the floriculture community to solve their day to day problem and can improve the quality of standard of living.

By careful research, rural libraries can preserve the knowledge and information of past and present to solve the future problem of the floriculture community. Rural libraries can store books, leaflets, newsletters, magazines, newspaper cutting related to floriculture as well as agriculture by contacting Rural Agricultural Information Centres from time to time for the literate and progressive farmers.

Library professionals of rural libraries of West Bengal can arrange discussion programs, talk show by contact experts of Rural Agricultural Information Centres for the floriculture community to solve their day to day problem in the field of agriculture.

With the help of Information Communication Technology (ICT), rural libraries can help the farmers by organizing audio-visual program (Like Krishi Dardhan Program by Doordarshan Kendra) produced by State Government as well as Central government from time to time in the local language which will help them for their sustainable development.

7. CONCLUSIONS

West Bengal is very much resourceful as a flower producing state in the atlas of Indian floriculture. There is no denying fact that floriculture continues to generate employment and earning opportunities for the people in rural areas of West Bengal. In this aspect, the Rural Agricultural Information Centre plays a key role to transfer floriculture related information. These centres all together work as a system for the smooth flow of information to the target audience or farmers. In this context, the rural libraries can play an important role to disseminate information to the floriculture community. Rural libraries can procure books, newsletters, leaflets and magazines on agriculture information in the local language, which will help the farm community to understand updated modern technologies related to floriculture as well as agriculture. But unfortunately, there is no such kind of facilities for the farm community. The government have to take a positive initiative in this field for the overall development of the farm community.

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